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Sen. Allen's snowmobile trail legislation headed to governor

LANSING – Legislation designed to create options for Michigan's snowmobile trail system, including the area between Gaylord and Cheboygan, is on the way to the governor's desk, announced Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City.

"When signed into law, this legislation will provide greater flexibility as we look to expand the state trail system," Allen said. "While this bill will not fully resolve the Gaylord to Cheboygan situation, I am hopeful that it will assist in bringing resolution to a problem which has dragged on for far too long."

Senate Bill 161 would allow snowmobiles to be operated within the right-of-way limited access highways, if a trail is approved through a joint agreement by the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources. The two departments would be in charge of establishing the details of the trail to ensure appropriate safety issues are addressed.

During the 2003-2004 legislative session, Allen introduced SB 1329, an earlier version of SB 161, after a northern Michigan task force studying how to establish a snowmobile trail between Gaylord and Cheboygan proposed this alternative. Unfortunately, SB 1329 was vetoed by the governor.

Under a compromise reached with the Executive Office, SB 161 would allow MDOT to prohibit snowmobile use on areas of non-limited access state highway right-of-ways if snowmobile use in that area poses a specific threat to public safety. Prior to closing a right-of-way, MDOT will be required to implement an alternate route that maintains access to businesses that rely on snowmobile-based commerce.

"With the state economy struggling, we must continue to work to promote the industries that will move Michigan forward, such as tourism," Allen said. "Snowmobiling serves as the lifeblood of northern Michigan's winter tourism industry. I hope the governor recognizes the importance of this issue to northern Michigan's economy and this time chooses to sign the bill into law."

Senate Bill 161 passed the Senate unanimously and passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 103-0.

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